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PAGANISM

The magic and mystery of the Brown Mountain Lights

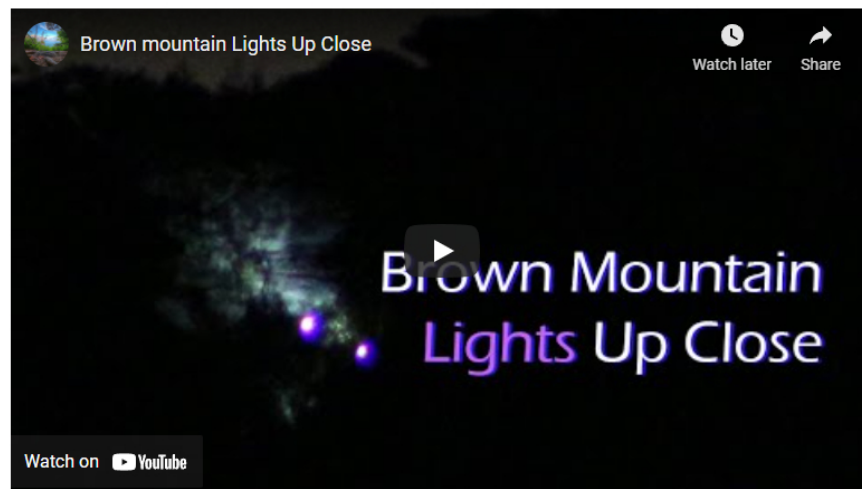
By  **Star Bustamonte** | November 28, 2021

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ASHEVILLE, N.C. – There is a phenomenon that regularly occurs in a small stretch of the Appalachian mountains, defying explanation – it is known as the Brown Mountain Lights.

While there are some videos of the lights, the clearest images of them tend to be still shots, like this compilation of photos taken in 2015. (There is a [fun video](#) taken during a National Geographic shoot where the camera operator is stunned by what he captured on film.)



How long the lights have been appearing and doing their mystifying display is hard to say. One of the first modern written accounts appeared in *The Charlotte Daily Observer* on Sept. 23, 1913.

More recent writings, like those from Frances Casstevens in his book, *Ghosts of the North Carolina Piedmont* (2009), cite examples of the story of the lights being shared by the Cherokee people as far back as 1200 C.E. "The Cherokee have a legend about a great battle that was fought that year between the Cherokee and the Catawba Indians near Brown Mountain," Casstevens says. "The Cherokee believed that the lights were the spirits of Indian maidens as they searched over the centuries for their dead husbands."

He also notes that the lights are attributed to being "ghosts doomed to walk back and forth across the mountain for all eternity," possibly being the "spirit of a slave searching the woods for his master."

Regardless of the more fanciful theories of what causes the lights to appear and disappear, the U.S. government has conducted investigation of the lights on more than

one occasion. In 1922, the U.S. Geological Survey sent geologist George R. Mansfield to look into the mystery. He famously claimed **in his report** that the lights were nothing more than locomotive or automobile lights or other man-made lights, and 10 percent were brushfires.

Considering how some of the lights can appear, it is easy to believe how they were mistaken for a fire a century years ago. Photographer Bill Rhodes, husband to TWH columnist Sheri Barker, wrote about the lights back in 2012 for the *Mountain Xpress*, when the lights seemed to be more active than they had been in recent years.



Photo was shot from Wiseman's view in 2012 with a 15 second exposure using 300mm lens just before dark
- Image credit: B. Rhodes

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While researchers and scientists have a number of theories about what exactly causes the lights, to date there has been no definitive scientific answer to that question.

Spiritually speaking, the lights of Brown Mountain have drawn all manner of speculation, up to and including the ubiquitous claim that aliens did it.

Sheri Barker has been to observe the lights of Brown Mountain several times. Her most recent foray to the area was different from previous outings, but she remembers well her past experiences.

Her recent trip was derailed by uncertainty in the soundness of the road usually taken to Wiseman's View, which is considered one of the best places to view the lights as they appear, disappear, and move along the ridges. This trip, as they were unable to make it to Wiseman's Views, Barker and Rhodes opted to go to the Brown Mountain Overlook off of route 181.

The distance from the overlook to where the lights appear is roughly about 5 miles, while from Wiseman's View it is only about 2 miles. Barker said the increased distance made a difference in how it felt, energetically.

"What I saw were lights that moved, flash very brightly in one location, and then moved to another location," said Barker, recalling seeing the lights in 2012. "They moved up and down, in circles, diagonally up and down, and in variety of colors that ranged from red, blue, green yellow, and orange. They do not last for any measured time.

"The lights move, and then disappear, and then reappear somewhere else but seem to be the same light due to being the same color," she continued.

For Barker it was not just a visual experience, but went well beyond that. "What I saw was a confirmation of what I was feeling."

She also described the shift in the energy before a light became visible. "In the seconds before a light would appear, there would be sense of something is coming. It was predictive in that I could feel the buildup of energy." She also described it as being like "those sub-audible moments when some part of you hears approaching footsteps before your ears acknowledge and hear them."

And when the lights did appear, Barker said, "[It was] not a burst of energy but a slow buildup or pushing of energy."

She explained how her recent trip to view the lights compared to previous viewings, and how just the physical perspective differed. "From watching these lights from Wiseman's View (western facing and looking towards the Linville Gorge) every inch of my being was not just watching but feeling, listening and experiencing them.

In 2012, Barker observed the lights ranging between Hawksbill Mountain and Table Rock, a distance of about five miles. In her more recent observation, she watched the lights from Brown Mountain Overlook, which faces Gingercake Mountain and Sitting Bear Mountain. Hawksbill is roughly four miles to the south, between Gingercake and Table Rock.

"The lights were very active from where we saw them at the Overlook but I could not feel them," said Barker. "The area where the lights appear, above the gorge and on the granite dolomite, quartz, and the water below, are all things that could provide resonance. [It was] close enough from Wiseman's view that you can see the lights from Overlook with no enhancement.

"Because of the distance I could not feel the energy like I experienced when at Wiseman's View," Barker said. "I was also very aware of the forest service road and could see where there were car lights that were not Brown Mountain Lights. Brown Mountain Lights did not follow the trajectory of the road."

Although Barker noted her recent experience was too far away to really feel the energy, she described it as viewed through a new lens. "With my increased relationship with **elemental energy**, I would say it is most closely related to an elemental energy with a hint of faery energy, for lack of a better term.

"I could clearly feel sense of sentience or intelligence. An energy that is deep, powerful, and primal that goes beyond what mainstream ideology might ascribe when using the words 'fae' or 'faery.'"

Barker's impressions of the buildup of energy before seeing the lights appear seem similar to those experienced by animals and even people before an earthquake or an impending storm. The lights may very well be some sort of natural activity that science simply lacks the tools to measure.

For anyone interesting in trying to view the lights of Brown Mountain, Barker has this advice: "From a spiritual or Witch perspective, if you want to have this experience you should approach it from an open mind, and carefully. A level of reverence but also slightly with caution. [There are] unknown possible dangers in an experience that can be intoxicating and overwhelming."

But are the lights dangerous? "Just like with any unknown, you need to protect yourself," says Barker. "Nature in and of itself is dangerous—be it bears, hurricanes or any other natural phenomenon."

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ABOUT STAR BUSTAMONTE



Star Bustamonte serves as News Editor for The Wild Hunt, and drawing on over 25 years of reading tarot, writes the weekly Tarot card of the week feature. She is a Pagan of an eclectic origin, serves on the Circle of Council for Mother Grove Goddess Temple, and is the Chief Bottle Washer and Lightning Bug Herder for Mystic South Conference. Left to her own devices, she would stay home reading books and drinking Guinness and trying to prevent her cats from getting their grubby little paws on things they shouldn't-like wine. She lives with her long suffering husband, who miraculously still loves her.

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Gordon Cooper · 9 days ago

These sound a lot like the Marfa Lights in Texas or the Hessdalen Lights in Norway. It is unlikely that car headlights or simple optical phenomenon can explain all of the sightings. Electrical phenomenon (piezo electricity, static discharge, etc.) are likely involved. In any case, these places are worth a visit.

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Govannon Thunorwulf · 9 days ago

There are places all over the earth that this happens. The new proposal for what it may be are mini black holes or power vortexes. They often accompany other phenomena and they believe that is what ancient people saw.

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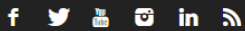
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